opening the mines. UCIL will also follow the norms prescribed by the respective State Pollution Control Boards and Atomic Energy Regulatory Board. The Health Physics Unit of the Bhabha Atomic research Centre (BARC) will establish Environmental Survey Laboratory to monitor relevant environmental parameters. All precautions will be taken with regard to health of surrounding population and protection of environment.

Supply of Uranium of Heavy Water Reactors

3490. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that india's nuclear power programme is heading for a crisis as natural uranium, the fuel that drives 13 Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRS) in the country, is in short supply;

(b) whether it is a fact that the load factor achieved by the nuclear power stations has come down due to non-availability of nuclear fuel as the development of domestice mines has not kept pace with addition of generating capacity; and

(c) if so, the steps Government propose to take so as to provide enough supply of natural uranium for 13 PHWRS in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN): (a) Uranium reserves in the country are adequate to support a Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR) capacity of about 10,000 MWe. The capacity of the 13 PHWRs currently in operation is only 3040 MWe. There is adequate uranium for the reactors in operation and also for those under construction. However, the operation of PHWRs at very high Plant Load Factors and completion of new projects ahead of the scheduled completion date by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), a Public Sector Enterprise of Department of Atomic Energy, has resulted in a temporary demand-supply mismatch.

(b) In addition to the 13 PHWRs (3040 MWe) in operation, 5 PHWRs (1420 MWe) are under construction and scheduled to start commercial operations in the next two years. With a view to conserve fuel for the entire PHWR capacity, these reactors are being operated at near normative levels of about 70% rather that at the high capacity factor of 90% which NPCIL had dearlier achieved.

(c) Uranium Corporation of India Limited is now operating four underground mines producing uranium ore to meet the requirement. New mines have also been planned in six more areas of which work at two sites has already been taken up.

Adequate reserves have been identified by Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research in different parts of the country. Techno-feasibility of opening new mines in these areas is also being looked into. These measures have been initiated to augment supply of projected requirement of fuel for the Atomic Energy Programme.

Import, Demand and Production of Coal

3491. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are planning to import coal;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the estimated coal reserves in the country;

(d) annual demand and production of coal in the country; and

(e) the reasons for Government not being able to produce sufficient quantity of coal from its own mines to meet the domestic requirement?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (DR. DASARI NARAYAN RAO): (a) and (b) Import of coal is not done centrally. Since coal is under Open General Licence (OGL), consumers are free to import coal based on their requirements. It is envisaged that the gap of 41.71 million tonnes of coal as assessed by the Planning Commission, between indigenous supply and demand of coal during 2006-07 will be met to a large extent through import of coal by power, steel and cement sector and other industries.

(c) The Geological reserves of coal as on 1.1.2006 is estimated to be about 253.30 billion tonnes.

(d) The estimated raw coal demand as assessed by the Planning Commission during the year 2006-07 is 474.18 million tonnes as against the domestic supply of 432.39 million tonnes.